

A PHOTOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE FAIRY WRENS OF SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND

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Above left: **Red-backed Fairy-wren**, [Photo- George Chapman] A northern species which has a definite preference for more open grassy habitats, although it can be found in the adjoining open forest.



Birds Queensland 2005

Superb Fairy-wren [Photos right- Slide Library above, Tom Oliver -below] A less common species here, certainly in comparison to its occurrence in NSW and Victoria. Of the three species it has adapted best to our urban gardens.

Variegated Fairy-wren [Photo- Jim Sneddon -below] This is the most widespread species in Australia, being found in thicker forests on the coast and scrubby woodland in the arid interior. Around Brisbane it has the strongest preference for areas with dense undergrowth.

The difference in these males in full breeding plumage is obvious, but the plain brown colours of the females, eclipse (winter plumage) males and immature birds is very confusing.



*Superb Fairy Wren
Oxley Creek Common*

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SUPERB FAIRY-WREN

Malurus cyaneus



Male at nest -above [Birds Queensland Slide Library] Females -top right & right [Ian & Jill Brown], pair -below [George Chapman], female -bottom left [Jim Sneddon], male with yellow petal -bottom right [Mel Stewart]

In all Fairy-wrens, the chicks have a noticeably shorter tail and at this stage are still fed regularly by the adults of the clan.



Note that the colours of the female, immatures and non-breeding male are all similar. Particularly note the red-brown lores & eye-ring and the plain brown tail. Compare these with the Variegated Fairy-wrens.



VARIEGATED FAIRY-WREN

Malurus lambertii lambertii

Male in full breeding plumage -photo right -Ian & Jill Brown; female below and male with chicks -bottom left, photos Jim Sneddon; female & 2 juvenile/ eclipse males (?) -Slide Library; male changing from eclipse to breeding colours -bottom right, photo Mel Stewart.

Note that the male in breeding plumage can change the shape of the cheek patches and even flare them out from the head.

The two brown birds to right in group of three have narrow white eye-ring, black bill and bluer tails indicating eclipse males. All Fairy-wrens stay in family groups, usually with a mix of females and males. And they help in the rearing of three or more broods a season.



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RED-BACKED FAIRY-WREN *Malurus melanocephalus*

The male at right is clearly displaying his scarlet back, and mid-right the five juveniles have little to distinguish them - photos Jill & Ian Brown. Mid-left shows a pair with the male again displaying - photo Julie Sarna. Bottom left has male with two plain brown females - photo George Chapman, and bottom right is the male half way through his change back to breeding plumage - photo Jill & Ian Brown. These variable coloured birds are usually seen in spring and can be confusing at times.

In areas with a good mix of grassland, scattered dense shrubs and thicker layered forest, such as at Oxley Creek Common, all three species can be found together.

